# Witness (1985 film)

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| ***Witness*** | |
| [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/b/bc/Witness_movie.jpg/200px-Witness_movie.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Witness_movie.jpg) Original poster | |
| **Directed by** | [Peter Weir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Weir) |
| **Produced by** | [Edward S. Feldman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_S._Feldman) |
| **Written by** | [William Kelley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Kelley) [Pamela Wallace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pamela_Wallace) [Earl W. Wallace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_W._Wallace) |
| **Starring** | [Harrison Ford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrison_Ford) [Kelly McGillis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kelly_McGillis) [Jan Rubes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Rubes) [Danny Glover](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny_Glover) [Lukas Haas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lukas_Haas) |
| **Music by** | [Maurice Jarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Jarre) |
| **Cinematography** | [John Seale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Seale) |
| **Editing by** | [Thom Noble](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thom_Noble) |
| **Distributed by** | [Paramount Pictures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramount_Pictures) |
| **Release date(s)** | February 8, 1985 |
| **Running time** | 113 minutes |
| **Country** | United States |
| **Language** | [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) |
| **Gross revenue** | $68,706,993 (US) [[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-Mojo-0) |

***Witness*** is a 1985 American thriller film directed by [Peter Weir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Weir) and starring [Harrison Ford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrison_Ford) and [Kelly McGillis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kelly_McGillis). The screenplay by [William Kelley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Kelley), [Pamela Wallace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pamela_Wallace), and [Earl W. Wallace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_W._Wallace) focuses on a detective protecting a young [Amish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amish) boy who becomes the target of a ruthless killer after he witnesses a brutal murder in [Philadelphia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philadelphia)'s 30th Street train station.

The film was nominated for eight [Academy Awards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Awards) and won two, for [Best Original Screenplay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Best_Original_Screenplay) and [Best Film Editing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Film_Editing). It was also nominated for seven [BAFTA Awards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAFTA_Awards), winning one for [Maurice Jarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Jarre)'s score, and was also nominated for six [Golden Globe Awards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Globe_Awards). William Kelley and Earl W. Wallace won the [Writers Guild of America Award for Best Original Screenplay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writers_Guild_of_America_Award_for_Best_Original_Screenplay) and the 1986 [Edgar Award for Best Motion Picture Screenplay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Edgar_Allan_Poe_Award_for_Best_Motion_Picture_Screenplay_winners) presented by the [Mystery Writers of America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mystery_Writers_of_America). The film is also notable as the screen debut of future stars [Viggo Mortensen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viggo_Mortensen) and [Lukas Haas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lukas_Haas).

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## [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Witness_(1985_film)&action=edit&section=1)] Plot

Several days after her husband's funeral, Amish widow Rachel Lapp ([Kelly McGillis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kelly_McGillis)) and her young son Samuel ([Lukas Haas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lukas_Haas)) depart for [Baltimore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltimore) to visit her sister. At the railway station in [Philadelphia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philadelphia), the boy goes to the restroom, only to witness a brutal murder of an undercover police officer ([Timothy Carhart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_Carhart)). Samuel tells investigating detective John Book ([Harrison Ford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrison_Ford)) that there were two men involved in the crime but he could only see one, a strongly built [African-American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American) man.

Book and his partner Elden Carter (Brent Jennings) take Samuel around the city trying to find the killer, but Samuel fails to identify him. Later, at the police station, Samuel is wandering around when by chance he notices a displayed press photograph of Lieutenant James McFee ([Danny Glover](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny_Glover)) and identifies him as the murderer. Recalling a drug raid under McFee's command that led to suspicion of a police tipoff, Book goes to see police Chief Paul Schaeffer ([Josef Sommer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Sommer)) and advises him of Samuel's positive identification of McFee.

Later, Book is returning home when he is shot at by McFee, who wounds him in the abdomen. Only one man other than Book knew that he was onto McFee, and that was Schaeffer, who ordered the original murder in the first place. Book contacts Carter and tells him to destroy all records of the case in order to hide the location of Samuel's home. He sneaks Rachel and Samuel out of the city and drives them to their farm in rural [Lancaster County](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lancaster_County,_Pennsylvania). As he starts to leave the farm, Book passes out from loss of blood. Rachel's father-in-law, Eli ([Jan Rubes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Rubes)), reluctantly agrees to put up the "English" man (the Amish term for English-speaking outsiders) in their home, and arranges for an Amish [apothecary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apothecary) to treat him, using traditional methods.

Adopting [Amish dress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amish#Clothing) to be more inconspicuous as he recovers, Book begins to fall in love with Rachel. Her father-in-law disapproves of their relationship and warns Rachel that the community Elders are considering having her [shunned](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shunning). Book, an amateur [carpenter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpenter), fits into the community fairly well, making toys for Samuel and helping in a barn raising. A local Amish man, Daniel Hochleitner ([Alexander Godunov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Godunov)), wants to court Rachel, but senses her interest in Book.

After hearing Carter has been murdered, Book contacts Schaeffer and warns him he is coming for him. Later, when he sees some youths in town harassing Hochleitner and his family, Book severely beats them and, as the Amish are strict [pacificists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacifism), word of this unusual occurrence spreads quickly. Book realizes his cover has been blown and prepares to leave the farm, sharing a passionate embrace with Rachel in farewell.

Schaeffer, McFee, and Fergie ([Angus MacInnes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angus_MacInnes)), the second man involved in Zenovich's murder, arrive at the farm to kill Book. Unarmed, Book kills Fergie by smothering him with corn in a [silo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storage_silo), then shoots McFee with Fergie's shotgun. Samuel rings the farm bell, alerting his neighbors to a problem, and they come running. Schaeffer, knowing he cannot kill all of them, surrenders.

Afterwards, as Book prepares to leave, he shares a quiet moment with Samuel, then exchanges a silent, loving gaze with Rachel. As he drives away from the Lapp farm, he encounters Hochleitner walking up the road, presumably to resume his courtship of Rachel.

## [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Witness_(1985_film)&action=edit&section=2)] Production

Producer [Edward S. Feldman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_S._Feldman), who was in a first-look development deal with [20th Century Fox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th_Century_Fox) at the time, first received the screenplay for *Witness* in 1983. Originally entitled *Called Home*, the Amish term for death, it ran 182 pages long, the equivalent of three hours of screen time. The script, which had been circulating in Hollywood for several years, had been inspired by an episode of [*Gunsmoke*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunsmoke) William Kelley and Earl W. Wallace had written in the 1970s.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-Feldman-1)

Feldman liked the concept but felt too much of the script was devoted to Amish traditions, diluting the thriller aspects of the story. He offered Kelley and Wallace $25,000 for a one-year option and one rewrite, and an additional $225,000 if the film actually was made. They submitted the revised screenplay in less than six weeks, and Feldman delivered it to Fox. Joe Wizan, the studio's head of production, rejected it with the statement that Fox didn't make "rural movies".[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-Feldman-1)

Feldman sent the screenplay to Harrison Ford's agent [Phil Gersh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gersh_Agency), who contacted the producer four days later and advised him his client was willing to commit to the film. Certain the attachment of a major star would change Wizan's mind, Feldman approached him once again, but Wizan insisted that as much as the studio liked Ford, who had made Fox a fortune with the [*Star Wars*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Wars) franchise, they still weren't interested in making a "rural movie."[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-Feldman-1)

Feldman sent the screenplay to numerous studios and was rejected by all of them, until [Paramount Pictures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramount_Pictures) finally expressed interest. Feldman's first choice of director was [Peter Weir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Weir), but he was involved in pre-production work for [*The Mosquito Coast*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mosquito_Coast) and passed on the project. [John Badham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Badham) dismissed it as "just another cop movie," and others Feldman approached either were committed to other projects or had no interest in his. Then *The Mosquito Coast* went into [turnaround](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turnaround_(filmmaking)), freeing Weir to direct *Witness*, his first American film. It was imperative filming start immediately, because a [Directors Guild of America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Directors_Guild_of_America) strike was looming on the horizon.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-Feldman-1)

The film was shot on location in Philadelphia and the city and towns of [Intercourse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercourse,_Pennsylvania), [Lancaster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lancaster,_Pennsylvania), [Strasburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strasburg,_Pennsylvania) and Parkesburg. Local Amish were willing to work as carpenters and electricians but declined to appear on film, so many of the [extras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extra_(actor)) actually were [Mennonites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mennonite). Halfway through filming, the title was changed from *Called Home* to *Witness* at the behest of Paramount's marketing department, which felt the original title posed too much of a promotional challenge. Principal photography was completed three days before the scheduled DGA strike, which ultimately failed to materialize.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-Feldman-1)

There are a few times the dialect of the Amish, [Pennsylvania German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania_German_language), popularly known as Pennsylvania Dutch, is heard in the film. In one scene, during construction of the new barn, a man says to John Book, "Du huschd hott gschofft. Sell waar guud!," which means "You worked hard. That was good!" But more often the Amish characters are heard speaking [High German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_German_languages), the standard language of most German-speaking Europeans, which actually is used rarely by the Amish people.

## [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Witness_(1985_film)&action=edit&section=3)] Cast

* [Harrison Ford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrison_Ford) ..... Det. Capt. John Book
* [Kelly McGillis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kelly_McGillis) ..... Rachel Lapp
* [Lukas Haas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lukas_Haas) ..... Samuel Lapp
* [Josef Sommer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Sommer) ..... Police Chief Paul Schaeffer
* [Alexander Godunov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Godunov) ..... Daniel Hochleitner
* [Jan Rubes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Rubes) ..... Eli Lapp
* [Danny Glover](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny_Glover) ..... Det. Lt. James McFee
* [Patti Lupone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patti_Lupone) ..... Elaine
* Brent Jennings ..... Det. Sgt. Elden Carter
* [Angus MacInnes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angus_MacInnes) ..... Det. Fergie
* [Viggo Mortensen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viggo_Mortensen) ..... Moses Hochleitner
* Frederick Rolph ..... Stoltzfus
* [Ed Crowley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Crowley) ..... Sheriff
* [Timothy Carhart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_Carhart) ..... Zenovich

## [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Witness_(1985_film)&action=edit&section=4)] Critical reception

[Vincent Canby](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_Canby) of the [*New York Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Times) said of the film, "It's not really awful, but it's not much fun. It's pretty to look at and it contains a number of good performances, but there is something exhausting about its neat balancing of opposing manners and values… One might be made to care about all this if the direction by the talented Australian film maker, Peter Weir… were less perfunctory and if the screenplay… did not seem so strangely familiar. One follows *Witness* as if touring one's old hometown, guided by an outsider who refuses to believe that one knows the territory better than he does. There's not a character, an event or a plot twist that one hasn't anticipated long before its arrival, which gives one the feeling of waiting around for people who are always late."[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-2)

[Roger Ebert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Ebert) of the [*Chicago Sun-Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Sun-Times) rated the film four out of four stars, calling it "first of all, an electrifying and poignant love story. Then it is a movie about the choices we make in life and the choices that other people make for us. Only then is it a thriller—one that [Alfred Hitchcock](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock) would have been proud to make." He concluded, "We have lately been getting so many pallid, bloodless little movies—mostly recycled teenage exploitation films made by ambitious young stylists without a thought in their heads—that *Witness* arrives like a fresh new day. It is a movie about adults, whose lives have dignity and whose choices matter to them. And it is also one hell of a thriller."[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-3)

[*Variety*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variety_(magazine)) said the film was "at times a gentle, affecting story of star-crossed lovers limited within the fascinating Amish community. Too often, however, this fragile romance is crushed by a thoroughly absurd shoot-em-up, like ketchup poured over a delicate [Pennsylvania Dutch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania_Dutch) dinner."[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-4)

[*Time Out New York*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_Out_New_York) observed, "Powerful, assured, full of beautiful imagery and thankfully devoid of easy moralising, it also offers a performance of surprising skill and sensitivity from Ford."[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-5)

[*Radio Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio_Times) called the film "partly a love story and partly a thriller, but mainly a study of cultural collision — it's as if the world of [*Dirty Harry*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_Harry) had suddenly stumbled into a canvas by [Brueghel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brueghel)." It added, "[I]t's Weir's delicacy of touch that impresses the most. He ably juggles the various elements of the story and makes the violence seem even more shocking when it's played out on the fields of Amish denial."[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-6)

The film was screened out of competition at the [1985 Cannes Film Festival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1985_Cannes_Film_Festival).[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-festival-cannes.com-7)

## [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Witness_(1985_film)&action=edit&section=5)] Box office

The film opened in 876 theaters in the US on February 8, 1985 and grossed $4,539,990 in its opening weekend, ranking #2 behind [*Beverly Hills Cop*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beverly_Hills_Cop). It remained at #2 for the next three weeks and finally topped the charts in its fifth week of release. It eventually earned $68,706,993 in the US.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)#cite_note-Mojo-0)

## [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Witness_(1985_film)&action=edit&section=6)] Awards and nominations

* [Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Writing_Original_Screenplay) (**winner**)
* [Academy Award for Best Film Editing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Film_Editing) (**winner**)
* [Academy Award for Best Picture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Best_Picture) (nominee)
* [Academy Award for Best Director](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Best_Director) (nominee)
* [Academy Award for Best Actor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Best_Actor) (Harrison Ford, nominee)
* [Academy Award for Best Art Direction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Best_Art_Direction) ([Stan Jolley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stan_Jolley) and [John H. Anderson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_H._Anderson), nominees)
* [Academy Award for Best Cinematography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Best_Cinematography) ([John Seale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Seale), nominee)
* [Academy Award for Best Original Score](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Original_Music_Score) ([Maurice Jarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Jarre), nominee)
* [BAFTA Award for Best Film](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAFTA_Award_for_Best_Film) (nominee)
* [BAFTA Award for Best Original Screenplay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAFTA_Award_for_Best_Original_Screenplay) (nominee)
* [BAFTA Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAFTA_Award_for_Best_Actor_in_a_Leading_Role) (Harrison Ford, nominee)
* [BAFTA Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAFTA_Award_for_Best_Actress_in_a_Leading_Role) (Kelly McGillis, nominee)
* [BAFTA Award for Best Film Music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAFTA_Award_for_Best_Film_Music) (Maurice Jarre, **winner**)
* [BAFTA Award for Best Cinematography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAFTA_Award_for_Best_Cinematography) (John Seale, nominee)
* [BAFTA Award for Best Editing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAFTA_Award_for_Best_Editing) (nominee)
* [Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture – Drama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Globe_Award_for_Best_Motion_Picture_%E2%80%93_Drama) (nominee)
* [Golden Globe Award for Best Director](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Globe_Award_for_Best_Director) (nominee)
* [Golden Globe Award for Best Screenplay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Globe_Award_for_Best_Screenplay) (nominee)
* [Golden Globe Award for Best Actor – Motion Picture Drama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Globe_Award_for_Best_Actor_%E2%80%93_Motion_Picture_Drama) (Harrison Ford, nominee)
* [Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress – Motion Picture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Globe_Award_for_Best_Supporting_Actress_%E2%80%93_Motion_Picture) (Kelly McGillis, nominee)
* [Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Globe_Award_for_Best_Original_Score) (Maurice Jarre, nominee)
* [Kansas City Film Critics Circle Award for Best Film](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansas_City_Film_Critics_Circle_Award_for_Best_Film) (**winner**)
* [Kansas City Film Critics Circle Award for Best Actor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansas_City_Film_Critics_Circle_Award_for_Best_Actor) (Harrison Ford, **winner**)
* [Writers Guild of America Award for Best Original Screenplay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writers_Guild_of_America_Award_for_Best_Original_Screenplay) (**winner**)
* [Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing - Feature Film](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Directors_Guild_of_America_Award_for_Outstanding_Directing_-_Feature_Film) (nominee)
* [Grammy Award for Best Score Soundtrack Album for a Motion Picture, Television or Other Visual Media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammy_Award_for_Best_Score_Soundtrack_Album_for_a_Motion_Picture,_Television_or_Other_Visual_Media) (nominee)
* [American Cinema Editors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Cinema_Editors) Award for Best Edited Feature Film (**winner**)
* [Australian Cinematographers Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Cinematographers_Society) Award for Cinematographer of the Year (**winner**)
* [British Society of Cinematographers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Society_of_Cinematographers) Award for Best Cinematography (nominee)